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Explorations of the role of external actors in external mediation, and reconciliation processes, foreign policy to achieve successful conflict resolution

Introduction

The process of conflict resolution is multifaceted and complex. External mediation, reconciliation, and foreign policy are examined in this analysis as separate facets of conflict resolution. External mediation is relevant to ongoing conflicts, and its external actors are external mediators and international organisations. Reconciliation is a post-conflict process; relevant external actors are international governments and organisations. Foreign policy is relevant in both external mediation and reconciliation; the relevant external actors are external mediators, international organisations, and diplomats. Through this examination, the importance of context-based resolution efforts, particularly important with external actors, will be emphasised.

Methodology

This paper examines three separate facets of conflict resolution: external mediation, reconciliation, and foreign policy. For each, there is a brief definition and an analysis of the relevance of external actors in their success. 1-2 case studies that exemplify this relevance are analysed to demonstrate success or lack thereof according to appropriate methods.

External Mediation

Conflict management, within this evaluation, is understood within the context of foreign and domestic policy. Policy is a manifestation of a State's goals, and these internal priorities influence the strategies and methods used in conflict resolution. The particular objectives of mediation for an individual State is thus driven primarily by a State's political context and secondarily for the successful end to a conflict. International external mediation, thus, must be understood as additionally vulnerable to political pressures (Bercovitch 1991, 4). Mediation must balance not only the cultural and political desires of the conflicting States, but the motivations of the mediating party. The mediating party is rarely as impartial as mediation methodologies demand.

Mediation is considered successful depending upon a variety of factors. Primarily, this hinges upon the trust and volition of all parties involved. This is a fraught condition-- parties are often brought into mediation by external forces; in external mediation, this is often the threat of tariffs and violence. Additionally, a significant tool in modern mediatory efforts are international organisations. The use of supranational organisations such as the UN and the EU to support mediation is often the motivating pressure behind the start of peace talks (Wallensteen and Svensson 2014, 319). Successful mediation must, as such, understand and balance the motivations of mediating parties, reasonably include international and supranational organisations in negotiations, and utilise approaches that emphasise the contextual needs of the populations affected by conflict.

The Dayton Peace Agreement (1995)

The mediation efforts of the Bosnian War exemplify the State-interest conflicts and the complex role of international and supranational organisations in mediation. Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) officially declared independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992. Conflicts between the three major ethnic groups of the area— the Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs— erupted over land ownership. The Serbian ethnic-cleansing gained international attention and condemnation, resulting in attempts of peaceful resolutions by the European Community (EC), the EU, and the UN. The first two efforts

by the EC and the UN, proposing ethnic divisions of BiH, were unsuccessful. Mediation in BiH was only accomplished due to external pressures of supranational organisation. The Balkan Group (composed of the UK, France, Germany, Russia, and the US) was somewhat successful as a foreign mediator due to the economic and political power wielded by the aligned nations. However, internal issues on approaches to negotiations with the Bosnians Serbs soon divided the Group into opposing alignments, leading to a standstill in negotiation. The 1995 Markale Massacre, alongside the deteriorating US-European relations as a result of the issues within the Group, spurred the US into interfering once more in the conflict. Russia, alongside the rest of the Contact Group participants, increased pressure on Bosnian leaders until they met in Dayton, US, and agreed to a previously proposed Balkan Group proposition (Levi 2014). In summary, violent events sparking international outrage and the disruption of economic and political connections led to an imposition of economic and military power that resulted in a "successful" mediation.

The Dayton Peace Agreement was a theoretical success in terms of bringing an end to an incredibly violent conflict. It has, however, been thoroughly criticised for its lack of response to the "facts on the ground"– creating a bipartite partition that enhanced political division rather than increasing inter-ethnic integration (Malik 2000, 303-4). Though its creation was a notable moment of international mediation, the wider state of conflict resolution in Bosnia-Herzegovina is considered unsuccessful due to the circumstances of the mediation, the allocation of land distribution, methods of refugee and election provisions, and a failure to implement agreed-upon policies during the reconciliation process. The artificial creation of a consociational political system has entrenched ethnic divisions, excluded minority groups, and led to continued instability (Human Rights Watch 2023; Kubo 2002, 73-5; Tolksdorf 2015). While the methods of foreign mediation used were successful in finalising an agreement, it was unsuccessful as a strategy of mediation because the external actors behaving as mediators failed to qualify as trusted parties. Further, Bosnian parties did not participate voluntarily in mediation efforts: the UN Security Council's imposition of heavy trade embargos upon Serbia and Montenegro, in a mostly unsuccessful effort to curb their genocidal actions, alongside the US's later successful support of the 10-day NATO ultimatum and their direct military actions against the Serb militia, coerced all parties into participation (Levi 2014).

In many ways the inequalities created during the Bosnian War were entrenched and systematised during post-conflict reconciliation. This is an example of the disconnect that often occurs between the stages of conflict resolution, with conflict mediation taking place between rulers of groups, and the success of reconciliation being dictated by local actors. These issues not only highlight the conflict between the interests of external mediators and conflicting parties, but also the conflict between mediation methods and other resolution methods. Mediating actions, like all conflict resolution actions, must respond to the contextual needs of a situation. A top-down approach to mediation and conflict-resolution leads to long-term instability and inequalities, as evidenced by this case.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the premise of conflict management, a promise for a relationship of eventual coexistence between conflicting parties, and the basis for lasting peace. In the modern day of globalisation, reconciliation makes thorough use of external actors, particularly foreign governments. As is always the case with external actors, their actions are guided by private interests that must be balanced with genuine efforts of reconciliation guided by local cultural needs and priorities.

South and North Korea

The events of the Korean Peninsula stand as a compelling case study of the interplay of external forces that have shaped its reconciliation efforts. Historically, the Korean Peninsula was

a cohesive entity under dynastic rule. However, the conclusion of World War II marked a seismic shift as the Korean territory became a focal point of escalating Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union (Pruitt 2021). The subsequent Korean War, from 1950-53, further exacerbated the division, resulting in substantial casualties and entrenching adversarial relations between the two Koreas.

Despite the protracted conflict and geopolitical complexities, the desire for peace and reunification has persisted. The June 15th North–South Joint Declaration in 2000 marked a significant milestone, facilitated by diplomatic meetings between the leaders of both Koreas and supported by the United Nations. This landmark declaration paved the way for reunions of separated families and highlighted the human dimension of the conflict. The 2018 Olympics in Pyeongchang presented another watershed moment, with the Korean hockey team symbolising unity and cooperation on the international stage (AP 2018). This unprecedented event, orchestrated with the support of the Olympic committee, showcased the transformative power of sports and cultural exchange in fostering mutual understanding and bridging divides (Waleik 2020).

The role of external powers, including the United States, China, and Russia, has been pivotal in shaping the dynamics of Korean reconciliation. The United States' enduring military presence in South Korea has played a central role in Korean affairs. Their military alliance and diplomatic initiatives across various administrations have significantly influenced Korean reconciliation processes. China, North Korea's historical ally and neighbour, also maintains substantial influence over the dynamics of the Korean Peninsula. China's strategic interests in maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula and broader regional ambitions have shaped its approach towards reconciliation, and it has frequently acted as a mediator between the Koreas. As a major regional power, Russia's diplomatic efforts have actively promoted Korean reconciliation, and its participation in multilateral forums and dialogue mechanisms has provided a platform for engagement and cooperation between the two Koreas and other stakeholders. Russia's economic interests in the Korean Peninsula, including potential infrastructure projects and energy cooperation, is the primary influence in its approach towards Korean reconciliation.

Roland Bleiker's seminal work notes the cultural dimensions of the division and the transformative power of mutual understanding and respect in reconciliation between the nations. It emphasises the resilience of the Korean people and their aspirations for reunification, advocating for a paradigm shift towards a culture of reconciliation that transcends political differences and historical grievances (Beiker 2005). The journey towards Korean reconciliation is intricately woven with historical legacies, geopolitical rivalries, and cultural aspirations. The communal enduring desire for peace and cross-national community ties, coupled with international cooperation, dialogue, and the transformative power of cultural exchange, offers increasing potential for successful Korean reconciliation. As the Korean Peninsula continues to navigate the complexities of its geopolitical landscape, the roles of local cultural resilience, external powers, and diplomatic initiatives remain crucial factors in shaping the prospects for a prosperous future.

Iraq Reconciliation

The conflict in Iraq was the result of the continuous territorial struggles between ISIL (formerly al-Qa'ida), a terrorist organisation founded in 2004 to expand territorial governance and rule under a strict interpretation of sharia, Islam's legal system (BBC News 2021). ISIL exploited Iraq's sectarianism to reduce support for the US and Iraqi governments, targeting Iraq and Coalition forces as well as civilians to expel foreigners from the country (Director of National Intelligence n.d.). At its height, ISIL held around 40 percent of Iraq's territory. By December 2017, ISIL had lost almost all of its territories, including Mosul – Iraq's second largest city. While the tensions persist, the situation is considered to be in a post-conflict stage of conflict resolution (Wilson Center 2019).

Reconciliation in the region is complex-- the conflict displaced approximately 6 million people, and ISIL's impact on Iraq's culture, norms, law and society is long-term (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations n. d.). Many citizens have been ostracised due to a perceived association to ISIL, and are living in camps and other unofficial settlements under fear for their wellbeing (UN 2021). An estimated 280,000 people are living this way, with 180,000 in camps and 100,000 in unofficial settlements. Additionally, ongoing issues with securing documents and housing prevents many Iraqi citizens from working, travelling throughout the country, and accessing social and legal services (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations 2023).

Due to the decimation of the infrastructural system in Iraq, the role of foreign organisations in reconciliation methods has been massive. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) have played a particularly large role. These organisations provide social and economic support, including provision of shelter and cash assistance and assistance with documents and paperwork. Importantly, they are reinforcing civil society capacities by creating mechanisms for community dialogue, including the operation of 28 Local Peace Committees (LPCs) and assisting national systems in effectively coordinating community reconciliation efforts. They are also training social workers and disseminating information about the situation in Iraq through social media, increasing the foreign presence in the discussion about unity in Iraq (United Nations Development Programme 2021). As a result of LPC efforts, by 2021 approximately 3200 ISIL affiliated families were able to safely return to society through local peace agreements. There also was a rise in social media campaigns to promote social unity in Iraq due to UNDP efforts, and 659 social workers were trained to provide psychosocial support and treatment for victims of the conflict. Additionally, over 100,000 beneficiaries were supported during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic through the distribution of food, hygiene products, and materials promoting awareness of the disease and appropriate safety measures (UNDP 2021). These strategies have been successful because they support mechanisms operating on every level of society, with both national structural supports and culturally-responsive community supports (Steele 2008). The cooperation between the local Iraqi government and international institutions such as UNDP, IOM, DG ECHO has been particularly vital to its success.

Foreign Policy

Economic and political relations form an interconnected network. Armed conflicts affect not only directly involved States but also any other State linked to them politically, socially, or economically. Consequently, an entire international community bears the consequences of a conflict. In literature, this interconnectedness is often referred to as 'shared responsibility,' emphasising the communal international responsibility for insufficient reactions and allowing aggression to escalate (M. Panić 2009, 2).

Foreign policy is an exceedingly broad term encompassing the international actions that shape the relationships between nations, spanning economic, sociological, and political dimensions. Unquestionably, it has a prevalent role in mediation processes between conflicted states and attempts to support the reconciliation process on multiple fronts. This is particularly relevant to the resolution of armed conflicts. Interwoven in external mediation efforts is foreign policy-- the actions of third-party states are often responsible for initiating reconciliation efforts. In the case of brutal armed conflicts, foreign policy is influenced by multimillion-dollar contracts, public and private interests of various stakeholders, and a conception of societal responsibility. Policy thus acts as a funnel between these factors and the actions of the State.

In the process of external mediation, diplomacy and diplomatic policy become particularly relevant. Politicians from third-party states, bound by economic and political ties, possess the tools and authority to encourage conflicting leaders to engage in negotiations and

create a platform for agreement. Through their presence in the media and active participation in conflict resolution attempts, diplomats and politicians also play an exceptionally significant role in addressing the societal aspect of post-conflict reconciliation. Recognition and acknowledgment of pain and injustice in public political discourse, especially when coupled with financial and systemic support, provides communities with a sense of understanding and alleviates emotional tension.

The role of foreign policy is particularly prominent throughout reconciliation, not just as a mechanism for support. The presence of external actors is one of the factors holding states accountable and adhering to agreed-upon conditions. This is often observable in the formation of governing bodies within a country. In the case of protracted armed and civil conflicts, confidence in the government is low. Members of the government, as well as those of the political, administrative, and judicial class, are often associated with the causes of conflict. Trust in authorities post-conflict is low, and the legitimacy of the government, even that of the State, is questioned (M. Panić 2009, 11). Therefore, a new government must establish its legitimacy as the paramount authority in the country, which often required international community support, particularly in the initial stages.

UN Mission in Liberia (1989-1997)

The role of external actors in foreign policy during conflict resolution is illustrated by the United Nations Mission in Liberia. The first civil war in Liberia lasted intermittently from 1989 to 1997 and claimed approximately 150,000 lives. From the start of the dispute, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was involved in negotiating a peaceful resolution, ultimately persuading the Liberian parties to sign a peace agreement in 1993. In the same year, the UN established the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), which succeeded in organising democratic presidential elections and achieving long-awaited stability. However, these efforts of reconciliation failed to address many tensions: lack of agreement between the government and opposing parties, human rights abuses, repression of political opponents, and a lack of national security sector reforms resulted in another civil war erupting in 2003 (UNIC Warsaw 2013).

On August 1, 2003, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution providing for, among other things, the establishment of international stabilisation forces in Liberia. A week later, the Secretary-General of the UN appointed a Special Representative for Liberia, whose role was to coordinate all UN agencies operating in Liberia, support peace talks, monitor the observance of ceasefires, and ensure the security of key national facilities and the civilian population. In September, the conflict parties signed a peace agreement, but they requested the UN to send international peacekeeping forces to Liberia, citing Article VII of the United Nations Charter (UNIC Warsaw 2013).

UNOMIL was a product of multidimensional policy efforts, addressing political conflicts, peacekeeping infrastructure, judicial corruption, internal affairs, human rights, demobilisation, and reintegration components for veterans, among many other efforts (UNIC Warsaw 2013). The mission was a notable example of the importance of foreign policy in post-conflict infrastructure, particularly in a situation of destabilised governance. It aimed to support the temporary government in implementing disarmament programs and, most importantly, in conducting and overseeing elections at all levels.

Conclusion

Effectively addressing conflicts in the contemporary complex geopolitical landscape requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges the role of external actors. This approach involves recognizing the significance of context-based efforts, engaging in multilateral operations, and implementing mechanisms that address structural issues within destabilised states. Context-based conflict resolution ensures solutions aligned with specific circumstances;

multilateral operations emphasise the collective responsibility of the international community, encouraging collaboration and resource pooling to tackle shared challenges. Mechanisms targeting structural issues within destabilised states tackle root causes, fostering long-term stability by addressing governance, economic disparities, and social inequalities. Together, these strategies form a comprehensive framework that balances the role of external actors within the implementation of sustainable solutions for promoting lasting peace and stability.

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